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Leadership: Is bad stronger than good?

Introduction

The hypothesis that "bad is stronger than good" has been suggested to be general across a broad range of psychological and social phenomena (Baumeister *et al*., 2001), including leadership (Einarsen *et al*., 2007). This means that negative events will tend to have a greater impact on the individual than positive events of the same type, and good can only prevail over bad by superior force in numbers (Baumeister *et al*., 2001). In line with this, an increasing number of leadership researchers are recognizing the "dark sides of leadership." Hence, both the negative and positive aspects of the relationship between leaders and followers are being considered (Clements and Washbush, 1999; Einarsen *et al*., 2007). Studies across several work environments reveal that there is often a strong prevalence of destructive leadership behaviours (Aasland *et al*., 2010; Glasø *et al*., 2010). Focusing only upon constructive leadership behaviours might therefore limit the understanding of actual influence processes between leaders and subordinates, which are composed of both negative and positive aspects.

Einarsen *et al*. (2007) have defined constructive leadership as acting in "accordance with the legitimate interests of the organisation, supporting and enhancing the goals, tasks, and strategy of the organisation, as well as making optimal use of organisational resources. Simultaneously, they enhance the motivation, well-being and job satisfaction of their followers by engaging in behaviours such as inviting subordinates to an extended engagement, and granting involvement and participation in decision processes. These leaders are concerned with the welfare of their subordinates while simultaneously being focused on goal attainment and the effective use of resources in the service of the legitimate interests of the organisation" (p. 214). There are several constructive leadership constructs (for example, authentic leadership and transactional leadership) of which the most used and well-researched

is transformational leadership. Transformational leadership aims to build trust, admiration, loyalty and respect from the subordinates toward the leader, resulting in the subordinates becoming motivated to perform more than they originally set out to do (Yukl, 2006). In this paper, we use developmental leadership to define constructive leadership. Developmental leadership is a Scandinavian development of transformational leadership. The main differences between transformational leadership and developmental leadership are that the latter is grounded in an interactionistic person-by-situation base. Charismatic leadership has also been toned down since charismatic leaders, in a Scandinavian context, are often associated with less favourable leaders (such as Hitler) (Larsson *et al*., 2003).

Destructive leadership has been defined as "the systematic and repeated behaviour by a leader, supervisor or manager that violates the legitimate interest of the organisation by undermining and/or sabotaging the organisation's goals, tasks, resources and effectiveness and/or the motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of subordinates" (Einarsen *et al*., 2007, p. 208). Krasikova *et al*. (2013) modified the definition by Einarsen *et al*. (2007) by (a) arguing that destructive leadership should be viewed as harmful behaviour imbedded in the process of leading (and by excluding behaviours falling under counterproductive work behaviour), (b) distinguishing between encouraging subordinates to pursue destructive goals and using destructive methods of influence with subordinates, and (c) defining destructive leadership as volitional behaviour. Schyns and Schilling (2013) propose another definition of destructive leadership: "A process in which over a longer period of time the activities, experiences and/or relationships of an individual or the members of a group are repeatedly influenced by their supervisor in a way that is perceived as hostile and/or obstructive" (p. 141). This definition does not include the anti-organization dimension but rather focuses on the result of and the subordinates' perception of the leader's behaviour. Similar to Einarsen *et al*. (2007), this definition also stresses that the behaviour is repeated over time. Consequently, occasional use

of destructive leadership behaviours are not considered destructive leadership. This study takes its point of departure in the definition proposed by Einarsen *et al*. (2007), viewing destructive leadership as systematic and repeated behaviour that can be directed both towards the subordinates and the organization.

Some scholars divide destructive leadership behaviours into active and passive forms (Einarsen *et al*., 2007; Larsson *et al*., 2012). While active forms represent more deliberate and volitional behaviours, passive forms are regarded as behaviours leaders use when they have more or less abdicated from supervisor responsibilities and duties (Einarsen *et al*., 2007). Researchers have discussed whether or not laissez-faire leadership (non-leadership, inactive) should in fact be regarded as a form of destructive leadership. There appear to be diverging opinions: some argue that a concept should not be defined by its consequences and that laissez-faire leadership is more related to ineffective behaviours than to destructive ones (Craig and Kaiser, 2012; Krasikova *et al*., 2013; Schyns and Schilling, 2013). In contrast, others have called attention to the negative consequences of passive, indirect leader behaviours on, for example, job satisfaction, efficiency, workplace stressors, bullying at work, and psychological distress (Frischer and Larsson, 2000; Kelloway *et al*., 2005; Neuman and Baron, 2005; Skogstad *et al*., 2007). This has led to the conclusion that laissez-faire leadership is a form of destructive leadership. Skogstad *et al.* (2014) state that this kind of leadership can be defined as a follower-centred form of avoidance-based leadership and is thus perceived as a volitional and active avoidance of subordinates when they are in need of leadership and support. Laissez-faire leadership has also been highlighted as the most prevalent destructive leadership behaviour (Aasland *et al*., 2010). Furthermore, two recently developed scales measuring destructive leadership include laissez-faire leadership behaviours (Larsson *et al*., 2012; Thoroughgood *et al*., 2012). This paper supports the idea that laissez-faire leadership is a form of destructive leadership.

We agree with the opinion of Skogstad *et al*. (2007; 2014) that laissez-faire leadership appears to be more of a volitional, active, and counterproductive leadership style than a zero type/ineffective. We also argue that a leader can intentionally be absent and uncommitted to his/her subordinates. A leader who chooses to prioritise the pursuit of their own interests or merits above the task of staff management may do so intentionally. Nevertheless, it may be difficult for subordinates to discover if the leader's absence is due to intentional priorities of self-interest or to ineffectiveness. In this respect, it is difficult to say whether or not a passive form of leadership is in fact destructive behaviour and it may instead be regarded as ineffective/non-leadership. However, if the outcomes of a leadership are destructive for the organization and/or the subordinates, the behaviour should be regarded as destructive regardless of the cause (inefficiency etc.) or intention, especially if the behaviour is repeated and systematic.

The growing interest in destructive leadership is suggested to be related to its costs, as it is noted that destructive leadership leads to absenteeism, turnover, and impaired effectiveness (Schyns and Schilling, 2013). Although researchers argue that bad is stronger than good (Baumeister *et al*., 2001; Einarsen *et al*., 2007), a recent meta-analysis revealed contradictory results, suggesting that bad may not always be stronger regarding leadership (Schyns and Schilling, 2013). Constructive leadership was found to have higher positive correlations than destructive leadership's negative correlations, with different outcomes such as job satisfaction, attitude towards the leader, turnover intention and individual performance. The only exceptions were commitment and well-being, where destructive leadership showed higher correlations (Schyns and Schilling, 2013). Only a few studies have included both constructive and destructive leadership behaviours in the same analysis. However, most are limited in the sense that they, for example, only include passive forms of destructive leadership (Mullen *et al*., 2011) or social support/undermining behaviours (Duffy *et al*.,

2002). In the present study, we therefore take a broader approach and examine if destructive or constructive leadership behaviours are the best predictors of follower work outcomes.

Follower outcomes of destructive leadership are of special study interest. In a military context, destructive leadership is brought to a head, as armed forces often perform tasks in life or death situations, putting great strain on the health and well-being of military personnel (Sweeney *et al*., 2011). Military teams frequently work closely together for long periods of time and under demanding conditions. In order to solve the task, team members need to get along and be able to collaborate. Individuals who are unable to handle the stress and pressure are not only a risk to themselves, but to the whole group (Campbell, 2012; Ness *et al.*, 2011; Sweeney *et al*., 2011). Below follows a more thorough description of those outcomes as observed in the available research.

The aim of this study was to investigate if the thesis "bad is stronger than good" also holds true for a number of leadership outcomes, more specifically: trust in the immediate leader, work atmosphere, emotional exhaustion and propensity to leave.

Trust in the Leader

A number of scholars identify trust in leaders as a crucial factor in both civilian and military contexts (Belenky *et al*., 1985; Kolditz, 2007; Sweeney *et al*., 2009; Sweeney, 2010). Kolditz (2007) has claimed that leadership in environments such as the military are more dependent on trust. Military subordinates are expected to give up their right to self-determination and trust the leader (follow orders) (Collins and Jacobs, 2002). Lack of trust in the leader may thus lead to negative consequences in the form of severe injuries or death. The strongest effects of destructive leadership have been found to be related to how followers feel about their leader (attitudes towards their leader) (Schyns and Schilling, 2013). Especially Tepper's (2000) Abusive supervision scale has been found to be more strongly related to

attitudes and behaviours directed towards the leader compared to outcomes such as turnover intention and performance. However, Schyns and Schilling (2013) suggest that this may be due to item content since Tepper's (2000) concept of Abusive supervision is claimed to have a stronger personal meaning (for instance affectivity and well-being) than other concepts that are more work-related (for instance turnover intention and performance). While Kelloway *et al*. (2005) found that constructive and destructive forms of leadership had approximately the same effect on trust in the leader, the meta-analysis of Schyns and Schilling (2013) revealed higher correlations for constructive leadership and attitudes towards the leader than for destructive leadership. Contrary to "bad is stronger than good" we therefore suggest that:

> Hypothesis 1: Constructive leader behaviours show stronger positive associations with trust in the immediate supervisor than destructive leader behaviours show negative associations.

Work Atmosphere

Soldiers and officers often work closely together under stressful and demanding conditions. In order to maintain one's spirits and be capable of functioning, a good work atmosphere is of utmost importance. Work atmosphere has not been particularly highlighted as an outcome of destructive leadership. However, research shows that passive leadership may create a work climate characterized by frustration and stress, resulting in anti-social behaviour in work groups (Einarsen, 1999; Leymann, 1996). Laissez-faire leadership has also shown positive correlations with experiences of workplace stressors such as role conflicts and role ambiguity, leading to conflicting expectations. Further, laissez-faire leadership has been found to have a high correlation with high conflict levels in working groups, which can be assumed to affect the work atmosphere in the organization (Hinkin and Schriesheim, 2008; Skogstad *et al*., 2007). Previous research also suggests that the relationship between laissez-faire leadership

and workplace stressors are mainly explained by the presence of laissez-faire leadership, not by the lack of constructive leadership (Skogstad *et al*., 2007). Given this, we assume that:

> Hypothesis 2: Destructive leadership behaviours show stronger negative associations with workplace atmosphere than constructive leadership behaviours show positive associations.

> Hypothesis 3: Passive destructive leadership behaviours show stronger negative associations with workplace atmosphere than active destructive leadership behaviours.

Emotional exhaustion

In military contexts, mental endurance and strength are paramount to preserving battle fitness, making this an important issue to investigate. The relationship between destructive leadership and individual-related consequences such as stress and well-being is well documented (Burris *et al*., 2008; Chen and Kao, 2009; Schyns and Schilling, 2013; Tepper, 2000). To illustrate, destructive leadership has been suggested to lead to subordinates expressing emotional exhaustion (Chi and Liang, 2013; Harvey *et al*., 2007; Tepper, 2000). This may have negative organisation-related consequences since individuals who feel emotionally exhausted tend to withdraw from their job in order to prevent further resource depletion (Chi and Liang, 2013). Based on the principle that bad is stronger than good, and the meta-analytical finding that reveals higher correlations between destructive leadership and well-being compared to constructive leadership and well-being (Schyns and Schilling, 2013), we therefore suggest that:

> Hypothesis 4: Destructive leadership behaviours show stronger positive associations with subordinates' emotional exhaustion than constructive leadership behaviours show negative associations.

Propensity to Leave the Profession

Several nations have abandoned their conscript systems in favour of an all-volunteer force. When all personnel apply voluntarily to the armed forces, greater demands are put on leaders to motivate their subordinates to continue their employment (Nilsson *et al*., 2012). Recruiting and educating new individuals can be costly and have negative consequences on the effectiveness of the organization. Several studies have emphasized the influence of the immediate leaders on the propensity of subordinates to leave the organization (Jones *et al*., 1996; Larsson *et al*., 2012). A lack of transformational leadership has been shown to have an influence (although modest) on nurses' propensity to leave their profession (Bycio *et al*., 1995). Research on destructive leadership has also revealed that negative leader behaviours are related to higher degrees of turnover (Ashforth, 1994; Schyns and Schilling, 2013). For example, Larsson's *et al*. (2012) findings showed a positive correlation between destructive leadership and propensity to leave the armed forces regarding conscripts and cadets. However, the study did not reveal a corresponding relationship for the higher-level officers (majors) in the study. Other studies have also shown that destructive leadership does not have a negative impact on military officers' inclination to remain in service (Reed and Bullis, 2009). Reed and Bullis' (2009) study only included higher-rank officers. We therefore suggest that:

> Hypothesis 5: Constructive leadership behaviours show stronger negative associations with subordinates' propensity to leave the organization than destructive leader behaviours show positive associations.

A summary of the five hypotheses is presented in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Method

Participants and Procedure

Questionnaire responses were obtained from military personnel in Estonia, Sweden, Switzerland and the Netherlands attending courses at their respective national defence academies. Before giving informed consent, all participants received oral and/or written information about the study. The Estonian and Dutch data was collected in two ways: (a) during class room settings and (b) online (by e-mail). The Swedish and Swiss data were collected during ordinary classroom settings. Participants responded anonymously. The response rate was 100 % for the Estonian sample, 90 % for the Dutch sample, and 62 % for the Swedish sample. The response rate for the Swiss sample is unknown. The number of participants was originally 625. Due to handling of missing values, the final number of participants was 533. The handling of missing values was conducted as follows. On the main instrument, the Destrudo-L, participants with two or more missing values on each of the four-item factor scales were dropped. For those with one out of four missing, the individual mean of the three obtained scores was entered as the score on the item with a missing value. As this procedure was quite labour intense, on all other scales, missing values were replaced with the overall mean score on the item in question. A few additional participants were omitted from the regression analyses as they were deemed as outliers (> 3.0 *SD*). A description of the national samples is shown in Table 2.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Table 2 shows that the proportion of men and women differs significantly across the four countries. The Estonian and the Swedish samples have a larger proportion of women, while the proportion of men is higher in the Netherlands and Switzerland. The Swiss and the Swedish samples have a larger proportion of individuals aged 29 or younger, while the proportion of individuals aged 30 or older is higher among the participants from Estonia and the Netherlands. The Dutch and Swedish samples have a larger proportion of individuals with higher education levels. The Swedish sample also has a larger proportion of individuals

working in the army compared to Estonia and Switzerland. In the Swiss sample, none of the rated leaders were female. The participants from the Netherlands and Sweden also report the most favourable mean scores on the personality scale Emotional Stability.

Measures

The questionnaire was originally developed in Swedish and translated into English. Contacts in each participating country translated the questionnaire from English into their respective native language.

Emotional Stability. Data were collected using the one item from the single-item measure of personality (SIMP; Woods and Hampson, 2005) designed to measure Emotional Stability (neuroticism reversed) dimension/factor in the Big Five model of personality (Costa and McCrae, 1992): How much does each description sound like you? Generally, I come across as: Someone who is sensitive and excitable, and can be tense. Someone who is relaxed, unemotional, rarely gets irritated and seldom feels blue. The factor/item is measured on a nine-point, bipolar graded line.

Knowledge of the leader. Knowledge of the leader was measured using the item "I know my immediate supervisor/commander this well." The scale ranged from 1, "Not at all" to 6, "Very well."

Destructive leadership behaviours. The Destrudo-L, a 20-item questionnaire developed by Larsson *et al*. (2012) was used to measure destructive leadership behaviours. The questionnaire consists of five factors with four items in each: (1) Arrogant, Unfair (sample item "Treats people differently"), Cronbach alpha: .75; (2) Threats, Punishments, Over-demands (sample item "Uses threats to get his/her way"), Cronbach alpha: .69; (3) Ego-oriented, False (sample item "Does not keep promises"), Cronbach alpha: .78; (4) Passive, Cowardly (sample item "Does not show an active interest"), Cronbach alpha: .75; and (5)

Uncertain, Unclear, Messy (sample item "Is bad at structuring and planning") Cronbach alpha: .78.

Constructive leadership behaviours. To measure constructive leadership behaviours, 21 items forming three factors (Exemplary model, Individualized Consideration, and Inspiration and Motivation) from the Developmental Leadership Questionnaire (DLQ; Larsson, 2006) were used. As no specific hypothesis was developed regarding the three factors, a mean score based on all 21 items was used. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the scale was .96. Sample items: "Acts in accordance with the opinions he or she expresses", "Takes time to listen", and "Creates enthusiasm for a task". The response scale on the original questionnaire ranges from 1 to 9. However, in order to be able to mix items from Destrudo-L and DLQ on the same scoring sheet, the DLQ response scale was modified. Thus, the response scale on all items ranged from 1, "Never or almost never" to 6, "Very often or always."

Trust. Trust was measured with two items: "How high is your trust in your superior/commander's individual characteristics?" and "How high is your trust in your superior/commander as a leader?" The items were formulated based on a study on trust in military leaders (Fors Brandebo and Larsson, 2012). The scale ranged from 1, "low" to 6, "high." The Cronbach alpha coefficient for this scale was .91.

Work atmosphere. Work atmosphere was measured with four items based on a previous study on military personnel's motivation to continue in the armed forces (Larsson *et al*., 2007). Sample items included: "I'm getting on well with my colleagues" and "I feel that we have a nice atmosphere at work." The scale ranged from 1, "Do not agree" to 6, "Agree totally." The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the scale was .78.

Emotional exhaustion. In order to measure emotional exhaustion, nine items from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach *et al*., 1996) was used. Sample items included: "I

feel emotionally drained from my work" and "Working with people all day is really a strain for me." The respondents estimated the frequency on a scale from 1, "a few times a year" to 6, "every day." The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the scale was .88.

Propensity to leave the profession. Propensity to leave the armed forces was measured with four items based on a previous study on military personnel's motivation to continue in the armed forces (Larsson *et al*., 2007). Sample items included: "I have plans to change employer," and "I will quit shortly." The scale ranged from 1, "Do not agree" to 6, "Agree totally." The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the scale was .73.

Statistics

Dimensional analysis of the 20 destructive leadership behaviour items based on the covariance matrix was performed using structural equation modelling (SEM) with maximum likelihood estimates. The software Amos was used. The five-factor model obtained in the original Destrudo-L (Larsson, Fors Brandebo and Nilsson, 2012) was used as point of departure. Acceptable model fit was determined at a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of 0.08.

Subgroup comparisons were performed using chi-square tests, *t* tests, and one-way analyses of variance. Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to assess bivariate associations between variables. Statistical significance was assumed at $p < .05$. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used to test the five hypotheses. Separate analyses were performed for each of the four dependent variables: trust, work atmosphere, emotional exhaustion, and propensity to leave. In order to reduce the number of independent variables, each of the individual background variables and rated leader background variables were individually tested against each of the four dependent variables (*t* tests and one-way analyses of variance, except for Emotional Stability and Knowledge of the leader, where bivariate

correlations were computed). No statistically significant differences were found on any of the *t* tests or one-way analyses of variance, while Emotional Stability and Knowledge of the leader both correlated statistically significantly with each of the four dependent variables. Following from this, it was decided to keep these two independent variables and drop the other individual background variables and rated leader background variables.

For each of the four regression analyses a few additional participants were omitted as they were deemed as outliers (> 3.0 *SD*). Table 4 shows the final number of cases for each of the dependent variables. The independent variables were entered in the following order: (1) Emotional Stability, (2) Knowledge of the leader, (3) nationality (Dummy variables: Swiss, Swedish, Estonia, Dutch), (4) the five destructive leadership scales and, (5) the constructive leadership scale.

Ethics

All participants were treated in accordance with the ethical principles of human research formulated by the Swedish Research Council (2002).

Results

Dimensionality Analysis of the Destrudo-L

The goodness-of-fit between two different models and the empirical outcome was tested. The first included the five factors obtained in the original development of the Destrudo-L (see the Methods section above). The outcome was an RMSEA of 0.082. A second test was run where the following specified covariances between factors were added: (1) Arrogant, unfair and Threats, Punishments, Overdemands, (2) Passive, Cowardly and Uncertain, Unclear, Messy, and (3) Ego-oriented, False and all the other four factors. The goodness-of-fit of this model and the empirical outcome was acceptable, an RMSEA of 0.074 was obtained (90 per cent

confidence interval 0.068-0.080). Other common goodness-of-fit indices included a normed fit index (NFI) of 0.857, a goodness-of-fit index (GFI) of 0.903, and an adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) of 0.876. The factor loadings of all items but three were .60 or higher. In summary, the confirmative factor analysis yielded a result which was considered as good enough to proceed with the remaining statistical analysis using the original five-factor structure. As this SEM analysis was not the main aim of the present study, no tables will be provided in addition to the reported findings. Detailed results can be obtained directly from the authors.

Descriptive Statistics

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Table 3 illustrates that the destructive leadership scales generally have low means, while the constructive leadership scale have a high mean. Two of the dependent variables – emotional exhaustion and propensity to leave the profession – have particularly low mean scores.

The bivariate correlations within each of the two sets of leadership scales are high and there are strong negative correlations between the two kinds of scales. The bivariate correlations within the four dependent variables are modest to strong. Between these variables and the two sets of leadership scales, the bivariate correlations are modest to strong for trust in the supervisor and work atmosphere and low to modest for emotional exhaustion and propensity to leave. All are in the expected direction.

Multiple Regression Analyses

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were performed where the predictor variables were regressed on each of the four dependent variables. The results are summarised in Table 4.

[Insert table 4 about here]

Trust in the immediate supervisor

The regression equation of the final model was statistically significant ($F = 105.21$, $p < .001$) and the adjusted *R*-square was 0.69. The destructive leadership factors explained an additional 38.7 % of the variance in trust in the immediate supervisor, after controlling for Emotional Stability, nationality and Knowledge of the leader. The constructive leadership factor explained an additional 16.0 % of trust in the immediate supervisor after controlling for Emotional Stability, nationality, Knowledge of the leader and Destructive leadership (*R* square changes if entering constructive leadership before the destructive leadership behaviors: 51.7 % and 3.0 % respectively). In the final model, the following variables had statistically significant β values: Constructive leadership ($\beta = .875$, $p < .001$), Arrogant, unfair ($\beta = -.150$, $p < .001$), Nationality, Swiss ($\beta = .269$, $p < .007$), Uncertain, unclear, messy ($\beta = .126$, $p < .008$), and Nationality, Swedish ($\beta = .171$, $p < .036$). Hypothesis 1 could therefore be said to be supported.

Work atmosphere

The regression equation of the final model was statistically significant ($F = 25.8$, $p < .001$) and the adjusted *R*-square was 0.34. The destructive leadership factors explained an additional 19.1 % of the variance in work atmosphere, after controlling for Emotional Stability, nationality and Knowledge of the leader. Constructive leadership explained an additional 5.3 % of work atmosphere after controlling for Emotional Stability, Knowledge of the leader, nationality and Destructive leadership (*R* square changes if entering constructive leadership behaviours before destructive: 22.1 % and 2.3 % respectively). In the final model, the following variables had statistically significant β values: Constructive leadership ($\beta = .323$, $p < .001$), Knowledge of the leader ($\beta = .071$, $p < .004$), Passive, cowardly ($\beta = -.090$, $p < .016$), and Nationality: Swiss ($\beta = .195$, $p < .029$). Hypothesis 2 was therefore not supported. Since

the only destructive leadership scale that gave a significant contribution was Passive, cowardly, hypothesis 3 was supported.

Emotional exhaustion

The regression equation of the final model was statistically significant ($F = 12.13$, $p < .001$) and the adjusted *R*-square was 0.19. The destructive leadership factors explained an additional 12.9 % of the variance in emotional exhaustion, after controlling for Emotional Stability, Knowledge of the leader and nationality. Constructive leadership explained 0 % of emotional exhaustion after controlling for Emotional Stability, Knowledge of the leader, nationality and Destructive leadership (*R* square changes if entering constructive leadership behaviours before destructive: 4.9 % and 8.2 % respectively). In the final model, the following variables had statistically significant β values: Nationality, Swedish ($\beta = .283$, $p < .001$), Emotional Stability ($\beta = -.056$, $p < .001$), Passive, Cowardly ($\beta = .092$, $p < .011$), Uncertain, Unclear, Messy ($\beta = .103$, $p < .012$), and Threats, Punishments, Overdemands ($\beta = .090$, $p < .041$), supporting hypothesis 4, that destructive leadership behaviours show stronger positive associations with emotional exhaustion than constructive leadership behaviours show negative associations, although the adjusted *R* square in the final model is only modestly high.

Propensity to leave

The regression equation of the final model was statistically significant ($F = 9.59$, $p < .001$) and the adjusted *R*-square was 0.15. The destructive leadership factors explained an additional 12.5 % of the variance in work motivation, after controlling for Emotional Stability, Knowledge of the leader and nationality. Constructive leadership explained an additional 0.00 % of work motivation after controlling for Emotional Stability, Knowledge of the leader, nationality and Destructive leadership (*R* square changes if entering constructive leadership behaviours before destructive: 6.5 % and 6.0 % respectively). In the final model, following

variables had statistically significant β values: Uncertain, unclear, messy ($\beta = .257$, $p < .001$), Nationality, Estonia ($\beta = .336$, $p < .021$), and Arrogant, unfair ($\beta = .122$, $p < .029$), contradicting hypothesis 5.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate if the hypothesis "bad is stronger than good" also holds true for a number of leadership outcomes, more specifically trust in the immediate leader, work atmosphere, emotional exhaustion, and propensity to leave. Based on previous research, five hypotheses were formulated. In line with the results from Schyns and Schilling (2013), our findings are somewhat mixed. Below we discuss our findings for each hypothesis. Firstly however, we conclude that the dimensional analysis of the Destrudo-L using SEM confirmed the original five-factor structure and justified the following analyses.

Regarding trust in the immediate supervisor, hypothesis 1 was partly supported. The correlation with trust in the immediate supervisor was higher for constructive leadership compared to destructive leadership and it was also the constructive leadership factor that contributed most to the final model. Concerning work atmosphere, our results did not support hypothesis 2. Passive, cowardly was the only destructive leadership factor that gave a significant contribution to the model, supporting hypothesis 3, that the passive destructive leadership behaviors show stronger negative association with work atmosphere than active destructive leadership behaviors. Moving on to emotional exhaustion, besides nationality (Swedish) and Emotional Stability, the destructive leadership factors Passive, cowardly, Uncertain, unclear, messy, and Threats, Punishments, Overdemands gave significant contributions to the model leading to the conclusion that hypothesis 4 was supported. Finally, regarding propensity to leave the profession, hypothesis 5 was also contradicted, since the only significant contribution was noted for nationality (Estonia) and the destructive leadership

factors Uncertain, Unclear, Messy and Arrogant, Unfair. To summarize, the knowledge gained by previous research contributed poorly to our hypotheses. In the following, we will discuss potential explanations for our findings.

Obviously, one possible explanation for these findings may be statistical. The factors emotional exhaustion and propensity to leave the profession had skewed response distributions. A majority of the respondents estimated their emotional exhaustion and their propensity to leave as low. In contrast, the factors trust in the immediate supervisor and work atmosphere were also skewed, although not as much: most individuals gave high ratings for trust in their leader and work atmosphere.

However, if the results are not just a statistical effect, we would also like to suggest alternative explanations for our findings. First, a closer look at our four dependent variables reveals a certain pattern. Constructive leadership behaviours covaried more strongly with trust in the immediate supervisor and work atmosphere, while destructive leadership behaviours were more strongly associated with emotional exhaustion and propensity to leave. Trust in the immediate leader and work atmosphere can be regarded as positive phenomena while emotional exhaustion and propensity to leave can be considered as negative phenomena. The first two are positively formulated and the two latter negatively. These two pairs of phenomena also have another common denominator: trust in the immediate supervisor and work atmosphere have an external focus and are work-related concepts, i.e. the items mainly focus on others who are significant in one's working life. Likewise, emotional exhaustion and propensity to leave express a more personal meaning, i.e. they estimate the individual's feelings and intentions. This suggests that constructive leadership behaviours possibly have a greater impact on positive phenomenon and/or phenomenon associated with work-related relationships. On the other hand, destructive leadership behaviours appear to have a greater impact on negative phenomena with a stronger personal meaning, which is in line with

previous studies. For example, Schyns and Schilling (2013) found that destructive leadership showed higher negative correlations with commitment and well-being while constructive leadership had higher positive correlations with attitude towards the leader and job satisfaction.

The responses on the positive outcome variables were explained to a higher degree by the predictor variables compared to the negatively formulated outcome variables. Thus, 69 % of trust in the immediate supervisor and 34 % of experienced work atmosphere was explained, compared to only 19 % on emotional exhaustion and 15 % on propensity to leave the profession. This shows that more person-oriented factors are mainly explained by other aspects. It also indicates the leader's limitations regarding influence on these aspects. They are mainly explained by other phenomena that are not controlled for in this study. For instance, trust in leaders have been suggested to be more determined by the leader's behaviors than demographics, personality, and structural factors (Dirks, 2006), while research supports that emotional exhaustion is not only influenced by leadership but also by other aspects such as personal coping strategies, emotional culture, and personal resources (Grandey *et al*., 2005; Ito and Brotheridge, 2003).

Our results show that the passive forms of destructive leadership had a stronger impact on our investigated dependent variables compared to the active forms, except for trust in the immediate supervisor. One reason for why Arrogant, unfair gave the strongest contribution, of the destructive leadership factors, to trust in in the immediate supervisor may be related to the fact that the factor can be said to express a lack of both integrity and benevolence which has been suggested to be core components of trust in leader (together with ability) (Mayer *et al.*, 1995). Fairness (or lack of) has also been shown to be associated with trust in leaders (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002).

Elaborating on why the passive forms appears to have a stronger impact on the dependent variables, it can be argued that these behaviors most likely are intermittent and therefore easier for the individual to deal with and have less effect on the daily work. A leader who behaves arrogantly, is unfair and/or uses threats may have the greatest negative effect on subordinates when he or she is present. In contrast, passive behaviours can be considered as reflecting a more lasting attitude or having a more lasting effect on subordinates' work climate. Passive behaviours have been found to be more likely to cause frustration and problems (even when the leader is not present) in terms of the leader creating a work climate characterized by uncertainty, role-ambiguity and conflicts (Einarsen, 1999; Leymann, 1996; Skogstad *et al*., 2007). These behaviours are probably more subtle and difficult to detect. One could argue that subordinates who score low on trust and high on emotional exhaustion and propensity to leave are more inclined to rate the leader's behaviour as destructive. However, emotional stability is controlled for in step 1 of the regression analysis, indicating that it is not emotionally instable individuals who account for these results.

Speculating on possible consequences of these findings, we would like to point to a potential problem. The factors Passive, Cowardly and Uncertain, Unclear, Messy, capture behaviours related to the leader being absent, not showing active interest, giving unclear instructions and behaving confused. These are behaviours that may be consequences of leader-related antecedents such as work-related stress. Due to shortage of time, leaders therefore may behave destructively and since one of our largest work life problems is stress, this implies that many leaders who would normally not be prone to behaving destructively, may fall into using passive destructive leader behaviours with unfavourable consequences for subordinates' health and performance.

Like previous results, our findings show modest to strong correlations between the different destructive leadership factors and constructive leadership supporting the finding that

destructive and constructive leadership behaviours do not exist apart but reflect integrated parts of leadership (Aasland *et al*., 2010). In order to understand leaders' influence on different kinds of work- and organizational related consequences, both destructive and constructive leadership behaviours need to be taken into consideration.

Finally, regarding practical implications, our results emphasize the importance of focusing on both constructive and destructive leadership at the selection stage, as well as during training of military leaders. Focusing on them separately obstructs optimal leader development and prevents leaders from gaining authentic self-knowledge. The results also point at the importance of including both aspects of leadership in leader evaluation processes.

Our results indicate further that destructive leadership has a stronger impact on negative phenomena with a stronger personal meaning. Krasikova *et al.* (2013) suggest that organizations are more prone to intervene when destructive leaders encourage subordinates to pursue destructive goals than when they use destructive methods of influence with followers. This can be valuable information for leaders as well as experts who work in Human Resources. Destructive leaders can have severe negative impact on individuals, leading to increased sick leave and/or turnover which, in turn, results in negative consequences for the organization. Passive destructive behaviors may perhaps be more difficult to discover compared to active forms which may lead to a less chance of someone detecting and intervening. In this respect, it is important to create structures for how the organization can detect and handle destructive leaders.

Limitations and Future Outlook

One study limitation is related to item construction. Two of the dependent variables were formulated positively (trust in the immediate supervisor, work atmosphere) and two were negatively formulated (emotional exhaustion, propensity to leave) and perhaps the discovered

patterns would have changed if the items were formulated uniformly. A second weakness is the possibility of common method variance and response set tendencies (Podsakoff *et al*., 2003) since all data were collected using self-report questionnaires. The scales need to be tested with other actors as raters, and, ideally, also using more objective outcome measures. Following from this, the results need to be interpreted with caution.

A third weakness is connected to the translation of the instruments used in present study. When translating an instrument to new languages a translation/back translation procedure should be followed in order to secure that the instrument is conceptually equivalent in each of the participating countries. This procedure was followed when the Destrudo-L and DLQ was translated from Swedish to English. However, the authors have no knowledge about the translation process in the other participating countries and therefore there is a risk that the concepts are being interpreted differently by the participants.

A final limitation is related to the lack of response rate for the Swiss data, reducing the generalizability of the data. Caution should be exercised in this case.

Finally, we would like to make some suggestions for further studies. To find out if bad or good is stronger regarding leadership, more studies need to be conducted in order to investigate the circumstances under which bad prevails over good and vice versa. One suggestion is to use measurements that are formulated in the same way, i.e. with the dependent variable measures all either positively or negatively formulated. Regarding antecedents, narrower bandwidth traits should be tested in addition to the general Big Five dimension used in this study. The predictive validity of carefully selected narrower traits has been shown to be higher compared to broader constructs (Ashton *et al*., 1995; Bilgiç and Sümer, 2009). It has, for instance, been reported that two facets of the Neuroticism dimension

– anxiety and anger – covary in opposite directions with sub forms of destructive leadership behaviours (Kant *et al*., 2013).

The fact that the passive forms of destructive leadership had the strongest impact also deserves further studies. Our study is cross-sectional and it may be possible that passive forms of destructive leadership are damaging in the long run while active forms are immediately damaging – to use the words of Thoroughgood *et al*. (2012). We therefore suggest that future studies examine the longitudinal association between different forms of destructive leadership and outcomes such as trust, emotional exhaustion and propensity to leave.

Leadership is assumed to be context-sensitive (Osborn, Hunt & Jauch, 2002). Therefore we suggest that future research attempts to replicate this study in other contexts, for example, in civilian contexts or during international military operations. Previous studies show that leaders who are good at structuring and who take prompt and decisive action are seen as more effective during critical incidents (Flanagan & Levy, 1952 in Hannah et al., 2010). It can be argued that passive destructive leadership behaviours should have the strongest negative consequences during international operations where passive behaviours leading to confusion and role-ambiguity, can have deadly outcomes.

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Table 1

Summary of Study Hypotheses

	Outcome measures			
Leadership behaviour	Trust	Work atmosphere	Emotional exhaustion	Propensity to leave
Constructive (C)	Stronger positive association for C than negative association for D (H_1)			Stronger negative association for C than positive association for D (H_5)
Destructive (D)		Stronger negative association for D than positive association for C (H_4)	Stronger positive association for D than negative association for C (H_2) Addendum, stronger negative association for passive D than for active D (H_3)	

Table 2.

Basic Description of the Participants

Background characteristics	Estonia *n* = 41				Netherlands[2] *n* = 319				Switzerland *n* = 68				Sweden *n* = 105				Chi-square/*F*	*P*[1]
	n	*%*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*%*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*%*	M	*SD*	*n*	*%*	*M*	SD		
Gender																		
Women	5	12			14	4			3	4			15	14				
Men	36	88			305	96			65	96			89	86			14.63	.002
Age																		
< 29 years	4	10			53	17			28	41			36	35				
>30 years	37	90			266	83			40	59			68	65			32.25	.000
Civilian education																		
Secondary school/high school	8	20			180	56			18	27			45	43				
College/ university	33	80			139	44			50	73			59	57			35.88	.000
Branch of service																		
Army	30	73							52	77			43	42				
Navy	1	2							1	2			30	29				
Air force	9	22							11	16			29	28			47.22	.000
Sex of rated leader																		
Male	47	90			314	98			68	100			97	92				
Female	4	10			5	2			0	0			8	8			17.36	.001
Emotional Stability			5.37	1.51			6.45	1.71			5.55	1.69			6.39	1.89		.000
Knowledge of rated leader			3.61	1.12			3.68	1.19			4.03	1.18			3.79	1.24		NS

[1] A Bonferroni correction was applied. All differences are at a 0.008 level of significance.

[2] Information on branch of service is lacking for the Dutch sample.

Table 3.

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for the Observed Variables (N = 625)

Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	*M*	*SD*
1. Arrogant, unfair[a]	**.75**	.59	.60	.42	.52	-.46	-.45	-.36	.28	.26	-.19	-.19	2.31	1.02
2. Threats, punishments, over-demands[a]		**.69**	.58	.44	.49	-.37	-.34	-.29	.28	.20	-.19	-.08	1.99	0.86
3. Ego-oriented, false[a]			**.78**	.59	.63	-.59	-.52	-.37	.32	.22	-.20	-.18	2.20	1.10
4. Passive, cowardly[a]				**.75**	.65	-.58	-.53	-.39	.34	.26	-.19	-.16	2.20	1.06
5. Uncertain, unclear, messy[a]					**.78**	-.63	-.58	-.41	.35	.36	-.12	-.18	2.15	1.04
6. Constructive leadership[a]						**.96**	.72	.52	-.29	-.26	.21	.34	4.36	0.91
7. Trust in the supervisor[a]							**.90**	.58	-.31	-.27	.16	.33	4.27	1.23
8. Work atmosphere[a]								**.77**	-.45	-.38	.12	.27	4.69	0.81
9. Emotional exhaustion[a]									**.87**	.36	-.20	-.08	1.93	0.77
10. Propensity to leave the profession[a]										**.72**	.06	-.14	1.85	0.94
11. Emotional stability[cd]											-	.01	6.24	1.77
12. Knowledge of rated leader[ad]												-	3.74	1.20

[a] The scale ranged from 1 to 6.
[b] The numbers in bold refers to Cronbach alpha scores.
[c] The scale ranged from 1 to 9
[d] Control variables

Table 4.
Multiple Regression Analysis

	Trust in the superior		Work atmosphere	
	β final model n = 525	*SE*	β final model n = 525	*SE*
Step 1				
Emotional Stability	.001	.018	-.008	.016
Adj R^2	.025		.013	
R^2 change	.022*		.015*	
Step 2				
Knowledge of the leader	.041	.028	.071	.025
Adj R^2	.140		.105	
R^2 change	.116*		.093*	
Step 3				
Nationality, Swiss	.269*	.100	.195*	.089
Nationality,Swedish	.171*	.081	-.041	.073
Nationality,Estonia	.193	.119	.180	.105
Nationality, Dutch	reference	reference	reference	reference
Adj R^2	.138		.104	
R^2 change	.003		.005	
Step 4				
Arrogant, unfair	-.150*	.045	-.040	.040
Threats, punishments over-demands	.094	.052	-.064	.045
Ego-oriented, false	-.070	.045	.006	.040
Passive, cowardly	-.080	.042	-.090*	.037
Uncertain, unclear, messy	-.126*	.047	-.018	.042
Adj R^2	.524		.290	
R^2 change	.387*		.191*	
Step 5				
Constructive leadership	.875*	.054	.323	.050
Adj R^2	.686		.342	
R^2 change	.160*		.053*	
Total R^2	.693		.356	

	Emotional exhaustion		Propensity to leave	
	β final model n = 520	*SE*	β final model n = 519	*SE*
Step 1				
Emotional Stability	-.056*	.016	.003	.022
Adj R^2	.041		.002	
R^2 change	.043*		.004	
Step 2				
Knowledge of the leader	-.032	.024	-.018	.034
Adj R^2	.054		.018	
R^2 change	.014*		.017*	
Step 3				
Nationality, Swiss	-.099	.086	-.119	.124
Nationality,Swedish	.283*	.070	-.141	.100
Nationality, Estonia	.047	.101	.336*	.145
Nationality, Dutch	reference	reference	reference	reference
Adj R^2	.069		.037	
R^2 change	.020*		.025*	
Step 4				
Arrogant, unfair	.021	.039	.122*	.055
Threats, punishments over-demands	.090*	.044	-.022	.063
Ego-oriented, false	.027	.039	-.082	.056
Passive, cowardly	.092*	.036	.045	.051
Uncertain, unclear, messy	.103*	.041	.257*	.057
Adj R^2	.191		.155	
R^2 change	.129*		.125*	
Step 5				
Constructive leadership	.040	.045	-.053	.065
Adj R^2	.191		.154	
R^2 change	.001		.001	
Total R^2	.208		.172	

*Statistical significance was assumed at $p < .05$.